

CHILDREN IN THE SHTETL

At Study and At Play

THE SHTETL BOOK, by Diane K. Roskies and David G. Roskies, is an exciting new book all about the *shtetl*, the small Jewish community of Eastern Europe. It would certainly be suitable for use in the classroom, but it is a book that you will enjoy reading on your own. WORLD OVER has introduced the *shtetl* to our readers many times before, but here for the first time are all aspects of *shtetl* life fully reconstructed in simple language and illustrated with lively photographs and drawings. In *The Shtetl Book* you will learn about How the Jews First Came to Poland, The Spread of Yiddish Through Eastern Europe, Jewish Workers, Growing Up in the Shtetl, The Synagogue, and much, much more.

We have chosen to focus on only one sort of *shtetl* dweller — the child. Children in the *shtetl* were not so lucky as you are. Often they did not have enough clothing or even enough food. But in their large families—some with ten or more children — there was always enough love.

Study began early. Boys often started attending *heder* to learn to read Hebrew at the age of three or four. To encourage these tiny pupils, on the first day of school the *melamed*, the teacher, would give his students honey to teach them the sweetness of the Torah. To teach the alphabet some *melamdin* created rhymes or riddles to help the students recognize and remember the letters.

But there was time for games, too. The children would use the *melamed's* riddles in their games to count players out and decide who would be "it"—just as you may use "eeny, meeny, miney, mo." They could not afford to buy toys, but they were just as happy with their homemade games as today's children are with the most expensive toys. Many of the games *shtetl* children played grew out of their studies—like the *Humash* game, based on the weekly Torah portion. In this game words and letters marking the end of a Torah reading counted for different numbers of points. Whoever found more of these symbols in a given time period earned the most points and won the game. But these children also played running games very much like the ones that you play today. In *Sheli-Shekha*, "It's Mine, It's Yours," one child would try to break through a line of children who were holding hands — just like the American game of "Red Rover, Red Rover."

To help you learn more about the children in the *shtetl* at study and at play, here are some photographs and drawings from *The Shtetl Book*.

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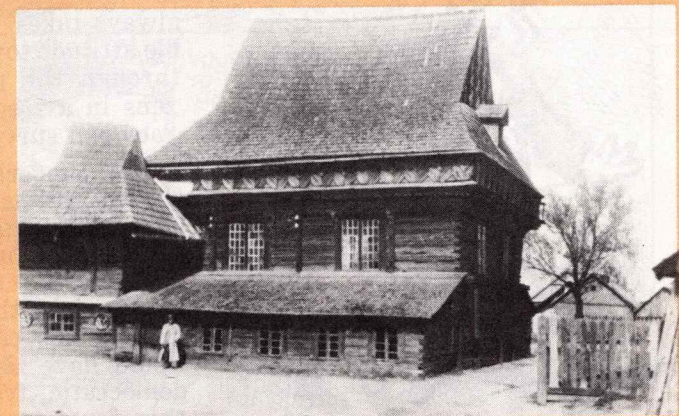
Children often gathered at the town bridge to splash in the water while their mothers washed clothes.



The boys in this *heder* in Poland sat on long, hard benches and huddled together to share their few books.



Girls also learned to read Hebrew in special *hadarim* for girls —often taught by women in their own homes.



Every Jew spent a great deal of time praying and studying in synagogues like this wooden synagogue in Zabludeve, Poland.



These children from an orphanage in Belorussia had lots of fun putting on the play "Pleasure From One's Children."



The kitchen was the center of the Jewish home. Children gathered there not only for food, but to warm themselves at the stove.



The heder students on this New Year's card by Hayim Goldberg are playing "grown-ups." One wears his father's hat and tallit, while another tries to blow the shofar.



The two boys on this New Year's card are playing hooky from heder to try smoking cigarettes. Shtetl children were sometimes mischievous, too!

○	○	—
—	○	—
	○	

Iks, Miks, Driks was the shtetl version of the game of "Tic-Tac-Toe." The board was drawn on the ground with chalk.

All the letters in this "Magic Square" are the first letters of words in one Bible passage. But since Hebrew letters are also numbers, any way you add the numbers in any row of the box, you will get 15. That's the magic!

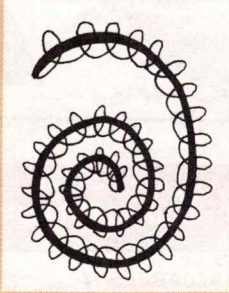
ח	א	ו
ג	ה	ז
ד	ט	ב

23 מוֹדֵד עַל יַד הַמִּשְׁכָּן צִנְהוּ מִחוּץ לְפָרְכָת: וְהַרְדֵּךְ עָלָיו
 24 עֲרֹךְ לְחֵם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִנְהוּ יְהוָה אֶת־מִשְׁכָּן: הַיְשֵׁם
 אֶת־הַמַּעֲרָה בְּאֶהֱל מוֹדֵד נִכְח הַשְּׁלֵחַן עַל יַד הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְנָבְה:
 1500 26 תַּעַל הַנֹּחַל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִנְהוּ יְהוָה אֶת־מִשְׁכָּן: הַיְשֵׁם
 27 אֶת־מִזְבֵּחַ הַזָּהָב בְּאֶהֱל מוֹדֵד לִפְנֵי הַפָּרְכָת: וְהִקְמֵר עָלָיו
 28 קִמְרֹת סָמִים כְּאֲשֶׁר צִנְהוּ יְהוָה אֶת־מִשְׁכָּן: הַיְשֵׁם אֶת־
 סִבְעֵי
 29 מִקֵּד הַפֶּתַח לְמִשְׁכָּן: וְאֵת מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה שֵׁם פֶּתַח מִשְׁכָּן
 100 אֶהֱל־מוֹדֵד תַּעַל עָלָיו אֶת־הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־הַמִּנְחָה כְּאֲשֶׁר
 ל צִנְהוּ יְהוָה אֶת־מִשְׁכָּן: הַיְשֵׁם אֶת־הַבֵּיִר בֵּין־אֶהֱל מוֹדֵד
 31 וּבֵין־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ חֲתוּן עֲשֵׂהוּ מִים לְרַחֲצָה: וְהִצַּו מִלְּפָנֵי מִשְׁה
 32 וְאֶהֱלֵן וְקִבְּיוּ אֶת־יְרֵכֵיהֶם וְאֶת־רַגְלֵיהֶם: בְּבֹאֵם אֶל־אֶהֱל
 100 מוֹדֵד וּבְקִרְבָתֶם אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְהִצַּו כְּאֲשֶׁר צִנְהוּ יְהוָה אֶת־
 33 מִשְׁה: הַיְשֵׁם אֶת־הַחֲזָר סָבִיב לְמִשְׁכָּן וְלַמִּזְבֵּחַ חֲתוּן
 מַסְסִיר
 אֶת־מִקְדָּשׁ שְׁעַר הַחֲזָר מִכָּל מִשְׁה אֶת־הַמְּלֶאכֶה: פ
 34 תִּקַּם הַעֲנָן אֶת־אֶהֱל מוֹדֵד וּבְקִבּוֹ יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן:
 500 לֵאמֹר־כָּל מִשְׁה לְּבֹאֵ אֶל־אֶהֱל מוֹדֵד כִּי־שָׁכֵן עָלָיו הַעֲנָן
 36 וּבְקִבּוֹ יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן: וּבְהַעֲלוֹחַ הַעֲנָן מֵעַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן
 37 יִסְעוּ בְּעַי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל מִסְעֵיהֶם: וְאִם־לֹא יִשְׁלַח הַעֲנָן וְלֹא
 38 יִסְעוּ עַד־יוֹם הָעֲלֹתוֹ: כִּי שָׁנָה יִהְיֶה עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְלַיִל
 תִּהְיֶה לְקָלָה בּוֹ לְשַׁעַר כָּל־בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל־מִסְעֵיהֶם:

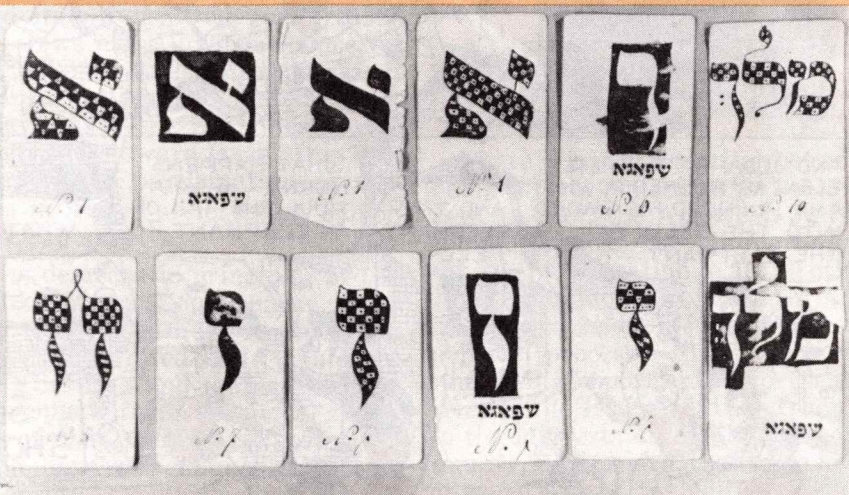
חזק

סכום מוקד דסטר חולה שמת אלף ומאתים ותשעה. אר"ט סימן: חצוי אלהים לא תקלי: ופרשיותיו אחד עשר. א"י זה בית אשר תבנו לי וסדרו עשרים וחשעה. הילה לילה יהודה דעת סימן: ופיקו ארבעים. תורת אלהו בלבו סימן: מנח המשתוח תשע וששים. והמשתוח חמש ותשעים. הכל מאה וששים וארבע פרשיות: יאה עורך מקדס ומצח יסעך סימן:

Here is a sample page from a Hebrew Bible showing how points were scored in the Humash game - 3,200 points for this player!



This Hanukkah game is much like the board games you buy today. You draw the letter pay on a large sheet of paper and draw rings over the pay. Each ring is a space. Instead of rolling dice, you spin the dreidel to see how many spaces you advance. First one to the center wins!



On Hanukkah, card games were especially popular. But Jews did not use regular cards; they made their own with Hebrew letters - like these 19th century cards from Moldavia.